A PLEA FOR THE POOR.

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A SERMON,

Delivered in the Independent Tabernacle, in Philadelphia, on Sabbath evening, the 18th December, 1814.

FOR THE BENEFIT

OF THE

FEMALE HOSPITABLE SOCIETY.

BY JACOB BRODHEAD, A. M.

Pastor of the Reformed Dutch Church in Crown-street.

PHILADELPHIA.

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TO THE

MANAGERS AND OTHER MEMBERS

OF THE

FEMALE HOSPITABLE SOCIETY,

THE FOLLOWING

DISCOURSE,

DELIVERED AND PUBLISHED AT THEIR REQUEST,

IS

RESPECTFULLY INSCRIBED,

BY

THEIR SINCERE FRIEND,

AND HUMBLE SERVANT,

THE AUTHOR.

North Fifth street,
January 2d, 1815.

A

PLEA FOR THE POOR.

"Plead the cause of the poor and needy."
PROVERBS, XXXI. 9.

IN obedience to this command, I appear before this christian assembly to execute a difficult but pleasing duty: difficult, because the subject of charity has been so exhausted, by the talents and eloquence of men, that it cannot be made interesting to an audience by its novelty: pleasing, because the preacher feels confident, that though he cannot offer any thing new on the subject, yet his plea for the poor cannot be ineffectual with those

who now hear him; collected as they are from the different religious societies of this city, and all professing to be actuated by the benevolent spirit of their common Saviour, who "*went about doing good.*"

This house consecrated to the service of Jehovah, is now converted into the store-house of the poor, and here are to be gathered the treasures, which the friends of suffering humanity are about to contribute to the relief of the helpless and the destitute. If ever the finer feelings of the soul are touched, it must be on occasions like the present, when human nature is exhibited in one of its most interesting forms; when the ear, and the heart are both affected at the tale of woe, and we are taught to feel like men and christians. If our attempt succeed not according to our wishes, or the expectation of that benevolent female association, at whose request

I have become the mouth of the poor to you; we shall have this to console us, that we have discharged a duty which we owed to God, to your consciences, and the poor of Christ: in respect to whom, he will one day say unto those who at his request, and according to his will now afford liberal christian relief; "*in as much as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren ye have done it unto me; inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world.*" If, therefore, there is one, a solitary being, who has entered into this house of God's poor, to withhold from them, that which Christ on their behalf now demands, let him retire, covered with confusion, and loaded with disgrace; and let him blush for an action which must stamp his character with merited odium.

The objects for whose benefit and assistance we plead, are justly called "poor and needy."

The very first article of the constitution under which the "Female Hospitable Society" act, declares, that it is instituted for the "*relief of the sick, the aged, the indigent, the widow, the orphan, and the destitute stranger.*" You perceive, therefore, that like the philanthropy of their Divine Master, their's is not confined to any one class of deserving poor. It is not our business now, to attempt an explanation of the plans of God. Why he acts as he does, is best known to himself; and why he hath permitted such a vast difference to exist between persons of the same flesh and blood, is a question which infinite wisdom must answer: but the fact that the poor are always with us, we know, as well as our duty in relation to it. The difference which exists between many of those wretched, pitiable objects for whom we solicit, and us, (however great it may be,) is owing, neither to their greater

crimes, nor our superior merit. If God in his sovereign wisdom hath so ordered, that they should be poor and you in easy, and many in affluent circumstances; it is undoubtedly for wise purposes. He makes you the honoured almoners of his bounty, and them his honoured pensioners. Poor they are, indeed, in soul and in body, and therefore they stand in need of our charities. Destitute they are, and therefore they want an arm to support them, an eye to pity them, and the assistance of the benevolent to relieve them. Though thus circumstanced, they are your brethren, and your sisters. They are animated with the same spirit, which animates you, and though now supplicating by us your benefactions, yet let it be remembered, that one day they shall be put on a level with us, before the tribunal of a righteous judge. There all will be equal as to worldly circumstances. What do I say?

equal! No. If it shall then be found that we have shut up our bowels of mercies against the calls and entreaties of the needy, our account to our judge will be made the more terrible, and the more momentous. Yes, we repeat it, for the helpless widow, and the more helpless orphan; for the sick and the dying, who have neither food, nor fuel, nor medicine; and what is, perhaps, still more affecting, who have none to whisper to their sinful, distressed, imperishable souls, the consolations of the gospel, we solicit your charities. We ask you, but not in our own name. In the name of that God, before whom the sun shrouds himself in darkness, and the pillars of the vaulted heavens tremble, we ask: In the name of that Saviour who has made you the almoners of his poor, we ask: in the name of Fatherless and Motherless Children, we ask; and we ask not in vain. Enquire of the benevolent females,

constituting the board of direction of this noble institution, who generously sacrifice their time, talents, and ease, for the benefit of the poor, if we speak not the truth. If it were not so, my voice would not be heard, and before you I should not appear, to ask for your offerings. Such are the state and circumstances of the poor and helpless whose cause we now present to you. Permit me to plead with you on their behalf,

First, from the commands, the promises, and the threatenings, contained in the scriptures. And my hearers, while God speaks, let all listen with the most profound regard, for to his voice all nature attends. Thus saith his spirit, "*Rob not the poor, neither oppress the afflicted, for the Lord will plead their cause, and spoil the soul of those who spoiled them. For the oppression of the poor, for the sighs of the needy, will I arise, saith the Lord.*" "*Charge them that are*

rich in this world," "*that they be rich in good works, ready to distribute, willing to communicate, that they may lay hold on eternal life.*" "*Make to yourselves friends of the mammon of unrighteousness, that when ye fail they may receive you into everlasting habitations.*" "*Honour the Lord with thy substance, so shall thy barns be filled with plenty.*" "*Say not to thy neighbour go and come again when thou hast it by thee.*" "*Is it not, that thou deal thy bread to the hungry, that thou bring the poor that are cast out of thine house? when thou seest the naked that thou cover him; and that thou hide not thyself from thine own flesh.*" "*Whoso stoppeth his ears at the cry of the poor, he shall also cry himself and shall not be heard.*" "*Wo to you, ye have omitted the weightier matters of the law, judgment, mercy, and faith.*" "*He shall have judgment without mercy who shewed no mercy.*"

Are not these divine commands, and pro-

mises and threatenings, POWERFUL PLEAS? can there be any thing more persuasive? The duties they enforce are binding upon all of us, from the man who possesses hundreds of thousands, to the person who possesses but a competency. From these suffer me to direct your attention, in the

Second place, to some of the examples of scripture worthies, and others. Perhaps it will not be improper to refresh your memories with the example of the Jews. Is it a stretch of truth to assert, that christians generally do not give the twentieth part of what they gave to the poor? Of all their fruit trees they received no profit till the fifth year. Of all the fruits of the earth they were obligated to offer the Lord the first. The sixtieth part of the land they were to leave for the poor. The fortieth part of their produce they gave to the priests, and a tenth to the Levites. All

debts contracted among this people, were released at the end of particular seasons: So that if we take all these items into account, we shall find, that they contributed to the support of religion and the poor a sum amounting to almost half their income. Will any one assert that these laws are now abolished; and that the introduction of the christian system has superseded all the Jewish institutions? Let such persons remember, that so far is this from being true, especially to the extent now asserted, that the morality of Judaism, is more strongly enforced in the gospel, particularly that part of it which relates to charity. If our Saviour hath left us no definite instructions on this subject, he hath commanded (what is of much greater extent) "*thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself.*" Very justly did one observe, "If under an economy so gross, in which differences

were made between people and people, nation and nation, God required his people to give (to say the least) a third part of their income, what? what! are the obligations of christians!" If we examine the sacred records we shall find the most illustrious examples to recommend this exalted virtue. Two will serve our present purpose. One is truly worthy to be imitated by you, ye lovers of Immanuel, ye benefactors of the poor: and the other is a noble instance of female worth, and of refined feeling. Who knows not that the name of Job is but another name for benevolence as well as patience? And would to God, that we all might have the satisfaction of appealing to our own conduct, to say with him, "*When the ear heard me then it blessed me; and when the eye saw me, it gave witness to me, because I delivered the poor that cried, and the fatherless, and him that had none to*

help him; the blessing of him that was ready to perish came upon me. I was eyes to the blind, and feet was I to the lame: I was a father to the poor, and the cause which I knew not I searched out." Oh! that his most eloquent and searching appeal and imprecation, might have their proper effect upon our hearts. "*If I have witheld the poor from their desire, or have caused the eyes of the widow to fail, or have eaten my morsel alone, and the fatherless hath not eaten thereof; If I have seen any perish for want of clothing, or any poor without covering, if he were not warmed with the fleece of my sheep; If I have lifted up my hand against the fatherless, when I saw my help in the gate; then let mine arm fall from my shoulder blade, and mine arm be broken from the bone.*" Nor does the word of God abound less in examples of female worth; examples which will remain monuments of human excellence and exalted

benevolence so long as the records of time shall be known. Not to be particular with regard to the woman of Zarephath, Martha, and the widow, (which are other names for compassion to the poor;) we observe, that all that can be great in the female character in respect to real charity, is exhibited in the life of her, of whom it is said, that "*she was full of good works, and alms-deeds which she did.*" To you, mothers, and daughters, we would recommend the conduct of benevolent Dorcas, in imitating whom you will resemble your divine Redeemer, who went about from house to house doing good. Leaving the scriptures, we might adduce hundreds and thousands of examples to recommend to your hearts the excellence of this virtue. The same spirit which inspired Jesus and his disciples, has been cherished by all his true followers. Heathens in the days of the primitive church,

seeing the extraordinary exercise of benevolence among the followers of the Saviour, ascribed it justly to supernatural causes. One of these* attempting to satirize christians in a discourse on the death of a suicide, eulogises christians and their charities (though he meant it not so) in the following manner. "It is incredible what pains and diligence they use by all means to succour one another. Their legislator made them believe that they are all brethren, and since they have renounced our religion, and worshipped their crucified leader, they live according to his laws, and all their riches are common." That tyrant, and persecutor of the christian religion, Julian, attempting to injure Christianity by clothing Paganism with its charity, thus writes to his friends. "Let us consider that nothing hath so much contributed to the progress of the superstition of christians, as their charity to

* Lucian.

strangers. I think we ought to discharge this obligation ourselves. Establish hospitals in every place; for it would be a shame for us to abandon our poor, while the Jews have none, and while the impious Galileans provide not only for their own poor, but also for ours." Of the religious countess of Warwick it is said, that she gave no less than a third of her revenue for religious and charitable purposes. Yes, brethren, if propriety did not forbid, without going beyond the limits of our city or of our acquaintance, we might designate a goodly number, some of whom are now reaping their reward in heaven, while many are still examples of the most enlarged charity. Permit me in the

Third place, to plead the cause of these poor, from the very objections which an uncharitable spirit, or sordid parsimony, may urge against it. Let us hear, and examine the ob-

jections of the covetous and uncharitable. "I have no more than I want," is the most prominent difficulty which we have to combat in behalf of the poor. Taking it for granted, that what is alleged is true, that many who possess abundance, have not so much as they want, or that they have not enough to gratify all or half of their desires; think what must be the situation of those who have nothing, to satisfy the wants of nature; who have not what they absolutely, most certainly need, to feed, to clothe, and warm the body. Is it, then, what our pride, or avarice, or our sinful desires, may please to want, that is to regulate the manner, or the measure of our charities? What is to regulate that sufficiency which we may desire? Is it covetousness, or is it the gospel of Jesus Christ? One of them will regulate it, for we cannot serve two masters. If covetousness must prescribe to us on this

subject, then I am bold to say, that we are excused altogether from the duty: then we are under no obligations to give, but are under the most imperious necessity of asking from others; for its voice is, incessantly, give, give. But if we shrink from adopting such a rule of life, then we must abide by the regulations of the gospel; and acting accordingly, the poor will not this evening be disappointed; they will have not a mere pittance, but abundance; and from these altars before which our gifts are to be deposited, will be taken overloaded supplies, which will neither leave us in want, nor diminish our happiness. Another apology very commonly offered for declining the relief of the needy, is drawn from the number of the poor, and their incessant wants. And can it be possible that the abounding of human woe and misery, is made a plea for hardening the heart, and

shutting up our bowels of compassion? Shall the increasing and incessant wants of the indigent, be made the occasion of withholding, what Jehovah demands for them; of refusing to deliver them from the empire of ruin and death? Shall the most powerful reasons for giving liberally, be made objections to our distributing at all? What an abuse of reason, and of religion! What an outrage upon every principle which exalts the nature of man! From this very circumstance we draw one argument, and a very powerful one, in favour of increasing our gifts, and enlarging our hearts, for the succour of the miserable. In proportion to the increase of poverty in any place, should be the increase of the liberality of the affluent. If tenfold more is now wanted to supply the wants of the needy, our liberality should increase in the same proportion. But again, some may

say that the times are hard, and therefore they cannot afford to give. From this melancholy fact we enter our plea in behalf of the poor. While we mingle our tears with yours, deploring the miseries of the world; while we especially view with much sensibility the calamity which has visited our country, and the severe distresses of thousands of our fellow citizens; we would ask, who feel most severely the pressure of the times? Who are exposed most to sufferings? Deplorable as is the fact, it must be confessed, upon the poor, the suffering poor, the evils are accumulated. They feel most bitterly; they are thrown out of employment; or from the necessities of the times are compelled to quit their vocations; and by them the loss or privation of a shilling is more felt, than a thousand would be by those who enjoy a competency. Because these are solemn truths at this time, we

should enter with more tender anxiety into the wants of the needy. If the times be hard for you who enjoy abundance, what must be the pitiable state of those, who have nothing that they can call their own but poverty, and want. It is hard to be poor, but to be treated with cruelty and contempt is adding misery to wretchedness. From the benevolence of your own hearts, and the rich reward which follows acts of christian generosity, suffer me in the

Last place, to plead the cause of the "*poor and needy.*" And here, unless there be no compassion in human nature, I cannot be disappointed. If you ask whether your enjoyment of heaven depends upon your abundant charities this evening; we unhesitatingly answer, No. Through Jesus Christ alone, and by his merits, you can enter into yonder mansions of glory everlasting. Were you to offer

before God, the treasures of a world, you could not purchase the pardon of your sins, nor propitiate the favour of the Most High. But this we are authorised to say, that the liberal alms of a christian, shall be abundantly repaid. The promise which the Lord made to the Jews upon their bringing in those offerings which they had withholden through avarice, is made to us all. "*Bring ye all the tithes into the storehouse, that there may be meat in mine house, and prove me now herewith saith the Lord of hosts, if I will not open you the windows of heaven, and pour you out a blessing, that there shall not be room enough to receive it.*" Let not the trite and unfounded objection be made, that it is a solitary instance. Examples have never been wanted to verify the accomplishment of this, and of others of a similar import. Never has the humane, benevolent, religious heart been left

without a bountiful reward. Who are the characters who have been most prosperous, and honoured in life? Who have enjoyed the sweetest consolation in their own bosoms? And whose memories have longest survived the wreck of this mortal life? To these interrogations but one answer can be made. Your hearts are not deceived when with rapture you exclaim, "they are the most prosperous, and honoured in life; they have enjoyed the noblest pleasure; their memories have been the most endeared, who have abounded most in acts of religion, and in works of mercy." Yes, while the hoarded treasures of the contracted, selfish, uncharitable person, shall be the monument, upon which the curses of Christ and his poor shall be inscribed, and his memory shall perish in the grave, the liberality of the generous christian, shall secure to him deserved reputation; and long after his body

has rested in the tomb, shall his memory be warmly cherished in the hearts of the poor. Never have the streams of that man's temporal mercies been dried up, who has not robbed God and his poor. "I challenge (said one very justly) the whole world, to produce any number of instances, of a merciful man, whose charity has undone him. On the contrary, as living wells being exhausted, more freely spring and flow; so the substance of charitable men, frequently multiplies in the distribution. This, like the widow's oil, increases by being poured out." Therefore said a magnanimous christian emperor, to the empress, who thought him too profuse in his bounty, "I shall never want money, so long as in obedience to Christ I supply the necessities of the poor, and abound in religious benevolence." If we could be persuaded, that adducing examples, was necessary

to confirm the truth of what we have asserted, we might spend hours in setting before you a cloud of witnesses. But this is unnecessary, since we have the proof at hand, and the witnesses before us. Do you ask where is the proof, and where are the witnesses? In the persons, and feelings of many whom I now behold in these holy courts. In the blessed experience of your lives, who abound in acts of mercy to the poor. Ye are the witnesses of this truth. Have you not in the fulness of your benevolent hearts found, that "*it is more blessed to give than to receive?*" Have you not found it a luxury, to deposit your gift before the altars of God, for the comfort of those who, but for your charities, would have been left destitute and friendless? And may we not add, that it is not in your giving towards a single object only, that you have experienced such a reward, but in your

daily and weekly relief of the honest poor. In the cellars, and vaults of poverty, where you who are the benefactresses of the destitute, have entered to carry bread to the famishing, fuel to warm the shivering limbs, and garments to cover the naked, you have been blessed, and could say "*the blessing of those who were ready to perish came upon us.*"

But we are happy to have it in our power to state, that we can offer to your benevolent hearts a still greater reward. I will not say that in contributing liberally this evening you will absolutely be the instruments of saving the souls of men, but I will say that you may be the means. In the sixth article of the constitution of this excellent institution, we find the following words.

"It shall be the duty of the special visiting committee to administer spiritual as well as temporal relief, to the sufferers who are with-

out earthly support, not excepting persons of any nation, colour, or profession. It shall also be particularly their duty to visit and instruct distressed widows, orphans, and wretched females in the alms-house, hospital, and prison, as often as permission to that effect can be obtained. They shall also pray with the sick, and exhort the healthy to seek the Lord while he may be found. It shall further be their duty to put into the hands of those who can read, and are destitute of the word of life, a copy of the sacred scriptures, and to use every prudent means to bring back lost sheep to the fold of Christ." Nor is this the whole of the excellency of this institution; for while they administer relief and comfort to the soul and body, they encourage industry in all who are able to work. In this point of view the manufactory* which the

* The manufactory, for the establishment of which the so-

society have established, is of vast importance. In fact, considering the nature of the institution, its liberal, and extensively benevolent plan; the indefatigable exertions of its managers, to do good to the souls and bodies of the really needy, we hazard nothing in asserting, that no charitable association in this city deserves better, public patronage. Since the commencement of this valuable institution in the year 1808, many hundreds have received aid, and a goodly number it is hoped have been directed to seek the salvation of their souls, through the instrumentality of the word of God put into their hands, and the advice and prayers of the visiting

ciety have made strenuous efforts, promises in time to afford constant employment and means of support to many, who find it very difficult, nay almost impossible, to find work elsewhere. And as the whole of the profits arising from the institution, are faithfully appropriated to the benefit of the poor, it is hoped that this infant establishment will be cherished by the friends of industry and humanity.

committee. And shall it be said, that a christian assembly, met together for the express purpose of contributing to the relief of the indigent, have permitted the worthy, benevolent conductors of this charitable establishment, to retire with a mere trifle? Would you as christians be willing to have it said by them to the suffering, perishing poor, who wait with anxiety the issue of this meeting, "We have asked of a christian congregation, but they have refused to give, and therefore we cannot help you; you must seek assistance elsewhere?" Above all, are you willing, that in the day of judgment it shall be recorded that this night, you either refused to give, or that you gave a very trifle? In this light we place the subject; and before we conclude, we ask you to accompany us to witness the proceedings of the judgment day, when we and the poor for whom we now so-

licit your benefactions, will be gathered together, and be judged out of the book of God. There will stand the king and the subject: there will be found the master and the servant: there will be seen the rich beside the poor. The books will then be opened, and the judgment will begin. There the oppressor will meet those whom he oppressed, and they will be judged. There the princes and the nobles will be set with those whom they have abused and persecuted in this world, and they will be judged. There will the aged sinner, who, by his wicked example, and precept, has been the means of ruining the young and thoughtless, meet those objects of misery, and they shall be righteously treated. There will the hypocrite be placed beside the most blasphemous wretch, and together must they be judged. And before that righteous bar, will the poor meet those, from

whom they solicited, and who had it in their power to afford relief, but refused; and then shall the judge say unto them, with reference to his poor, "*Depart from me ye cursed into everlasting fire, prepared for the Devil and his angels: for I was an hungered, and ye gave me no meat; I was thirsty, and ye gave me no drink; I was a stranger, and ye took me not in: naked, and ye clothed me not: sick, and in prison, and ye visited me not. Then shall they also answer him, saying, Lord, when saw we thee an hungered, or athirst, or a stranger, or naked, or sick, or in prison, and did not minister unto thee? Then shall he answer them saying, verily I say unto you, inasmuch as ye did it not to one of the least of these, ye did it not to me.*"* Who of us would be placed in these circumstances, for the accumulated treasures of the earth?

* Matthew, xxv.

Let it now therefore be known, whether ye prefer the curses of the poor, and the male dictions of God, to the blessings of the one, and the grateful thanks of the other. Let it now be known whether you consider part of your property your own, or belonging to Jesus Christ, and his poor. And if you, honoured collectors for the "*poor and needy*," return with a scanty supply, then let it be recorded, to the disgrace of this christian assembly, that they have asked, but have been disappointed.—Amen.

MINUTE

Of the proceedings of the Female Hospitable Society, from January 1st, *to December* 31st, 1814.

Received, for sales made at the factory room, No. 5, Apple-tree alley, as taken from the Superintendant's book of entry,		
Cash received,	$ 1239	39
Paid for employment, in and out of the factory, for spinning flax, wool, and cotton; weaving, twisting, and carding cotton; as taken from the secretary's books,		
Cash paid,	1086	43
Balance in favour of the manufactory,	145	96

Distributed to five hundred and sixty families; one third, enlisted soldiers' wives and children, as taken from the memorandum books of the managers,		
Cash in articles of sustenance and apparel,	1741	82

The books are at all times open for investigation, as to the correctness of the above statement. The society acknowledge the liberal support they have received, in many instances, from

a generous public; and are ready and desirous at all times, to give an account of their stewardship; and invite every one to examine the books for themselves.

The managers have also to thank the different printers, for the many generous favours conferred on the society, in their line of business; and assure them of their grateful acknowledgments, and that in the words of truth itself, not even a cup of cold water shall lose its reward.